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Chair: Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 49: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(A/71/13, A/71/335, A/71/340, A/71/343 and A/71/350)

1. **The Chair** said that, for years, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had been at the forefront in responding to the protracted situation of Palestine refugees, who accounted for over 40 per cent of long-term refugees. As it entered its sixty-seventh year, the Agency provided essential services to 5.3 million Palestine refugees across the Middle East, but its funding shortfall of \$74 million had jeopardized its ability to provide its core services for the second year in a row. Member States had a collective responsibility to ensure sustainable and predictable funding for the Agency so that it could continue to fulfil its mandate.
 2. The Agency's staff of 30,000 had made a remarkable contribution to human development in the Middle East, the eradication of communicable diseases such as polio and tuberculosis, and universal enrolment and literacy for refugee children in UNRWA schools. Amid conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, repeated surges of violence and the ongoing blockade in Gaza, the Agency continued to implement humanitarian and development programmes which had helped many Palestine refugees to escape poverty. The Agency had also been invaluable in providing a sense of hope and dignity to that vulnerable community, pending a lasting solution to their plight in accordance with United Nations resolutions. However, the Agency's accomplishments should not be taken for granted. It worked in one of the most polarized and conflict-ridden regions of the world and had been the first responder in five wars over the previous decade alone, losing more than 30 staff members since 2013. Member States should be proud of the Agency's achievements but it needed their ongoing support.
- Statement by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA*
3. **Mr. Krähenbühl** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) said that UNRWA had a responsibility to sound the alarm on behalf of the community of Palestine refugees that was sinking into the abyss under its very watch at a time when the Middle East was reeling under the effects of multiple armed conflicts with catastrophic consequences in human terms on a scale not seen since the Second World War.
 4. The conditions facing the 5.3 million Palestine refugees were worse than at any time since 1948, and the absence of a political horizon was draining them of resolve and creativity. Fifty years of occupation and ten years of a blockade in full view of the international community were etched painfully into the refugees' identity. More importantly, however, a young generation of Palestine refugees was growing up and losing faith in the value of politics, compromise and international diplomacy. Once the dust had settled from the crises in the region, the scars of Gaza, Hebron, East Jerusalem and Nablus, as well as the pain and suffering of Ein El-Helweh, Nahr el-Bared and Yarmouk, and the abuse and despair of Palestine refugees, would continue to stare the world in the face and with greater intensity.
 5. In the Syrian Arab Republic, over 60 per cent of the 560,000 refugees resident at the start of conflict in 2011 had been displaced, and some 120,000 had fled the country altogether. Most of the camps where the refugees had taken shelter since 1948 had sustained significant damage. Palestine refugees struggled to survive amid the destructive violence of armed opposition groups and the effects of Government artillery fire.
 6. In Gaza, children as young as nine had lived through three extremely violent conflicts over the previous eight years alone, and 2 million people — of whom 1.3 million were Palestine refugees — saw every facet of their lives defined by the illegal blockade. Freedom of movement was virtually non-existent, and some 90 per cent of the Agency's 260,000 students in the Gaza Strip had never left it. Unemployment affected a staggering 60 to 65 per cent of all youth and an even greater percentage of young women.
 7. While the physical consequences of successive wars in Gaza and the lack of progress towards reconstruction were clear, there was no way to assess the psychological scars and depth of despair among young people and the causes of the unprecedented rise in the suicide rate. Even the older generation of business people, who had been historically pro-peace, had been driven into poverty under the extreme import and export restrictions, joining the 930,000 people in Gaza who received food assistance. While the world focused on the ravages of wars in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Yemen, the situation in Gaza was being seriously underestimated and was irreconcilable with human dignity or the security of anyone in the region.

8. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, there was a different version of despair among Palestine refugees. Military rule and occupation defined every aspect of public and private life and entailed military incursions, restrictions on the movement of both people and goods, and punitive house demolitions. The continued and illegal settlement expansion was only making the situation worse. Military occupation was a potent incubator of hate and extremism, and something against which oppressed people would react. The Secretary-General condemned all violence against civilians, including the acts of violence inflicted on Israeli civilians in the wake of the protests held in October 2015.

9. In addition to the cumulative human toll of the occupation on Palestinians, the economic toll was also staggering. The United Nations had conservatively estimated that, in Area C of the West Bank alone, \$4 billion in Palestinian income was lost each year as a result of the Israeli military occupation. In 2010, Palestinian economists had estimated annual losses of \$6.8 billion for Gaza and the entire West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which vastly exceeded the generous sums received in humanitarian and development funding from donors. Despite those generous donations, the economic base of Palestine was being continually eroded, drastically limiting any potential for sustainable economic growth and job creation.

10. The dire situation was all the more worrying given that the majority of young Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank had been born after the Oslo Accords, which had promised a just and lasting solution in the form of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security. The failure to achieve that solution meant that an entire generation was at risk of losing faith in political processes and diplomacy. It was therefore imperative for the international community to take decisive action to re-establish a much-needed political horizon.

11. Jordan was the only field of operation in which UNRWA could count on stability and focus on its core activities. In Lebanon, high rates of poverty and unemployment were the primary challenge for the Agency and a source of extreme hardship for Palestine refugees, who were excluded from the formal employment sector and lacked access to most public services. In coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL), UNRWA advocated directly for refugee labour rights and maintained a productive and strong relationship with the Lebanese Government.

12. The risks of radicalization of desperate young people in the region were huge, but few young Palestinians had answered the calls of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and similar groups. Nonetheless, the international community should take steps to reduce the sense of insecurity felt by Palestinians and should recommit to helping to meet their development and humanitarian needs.

13. UNRWA therefore navigated a complex and deeply unstable environment as it delivered its core education, health and poverty mitigation services, and mounted large emergency operations to 1.3 million people in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the Syrian Arab Republic. It maintained stable delivery of essential services to the refugees throughout 59 official camps and refugee-majority communities in the field. Its size, reach and targeting were unique in the United Nations system and it was a hybrid body that was able to carry out both humanitarian and development functions separately or simultaneously using existing infrastructure and staff. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Agency was reaching 95 per cent of the refugees in need of cash assistance as part of its emergency intervention. It had increased attendance in Agency schools and had rebuilt two schools that had been destroyed in Qabr Essit camp. In Yarmouk, UNRWA had helped 120 students to sit for the national exams in summer 2016. A recent World Bank report had found that UNRWA schools outperformed the national schools by a year.

14. Despite the extraordinary challenges facing UNRWA in the field, the Agency had rolled out the major reforms in its medium-term strategy for 2016-2021 in the first half of 2016 rather than staggering them over the entire six-year period. In April 2016, it had introduced its new "food to cash" programme in Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank. Instead of being distributed in bulk, food was being distributed through electronic e-cards to some 160,000 eligible refugees, which empowered refugees by giving them the freedom to choose their own food. It was hoped that the new system would enable UNRWA to mobilize more resources and provide food to a larger number of vulnerable refugees.

15. Given that UNRWA worked in a landscape rife with political and security tensions, it was constantly assessing the scale and complexity of operational challenges. Amidst those challenges, its leadership had taken robust and difficult measures to control and, where possible, reduce costs, lowering spending to a bare minimum without cutting fundamental core services. It had reduced its 2016 shortfall by \$54 million and had produced a zero-growth budget.

Despite those measures, however, the Agency faced a shortfall of \$74 million and its financial situation remained a cause for serious concern.

16. New mechanisms were needed to put UNRWA on a more stable financial footing. While the Agency was grateful to donors and hosts for their remarkable support, the current system did not provide the necessary predictability of funding and placed the stability of the Middle East and the extraordinary progress achieved over several decades at risk. The humanitarian, political and security priorities of UNRWA stakeholders were not being served by the financial crises or by the annual process of bridging the gaps. The General Assembly played a critical role in finding ways to provide financial stability for the Agency. One way was through increased support from the United Nations regular budget, but that possibility did not enjoy universal support among Member States. However, it was clear that collective action was required to find concrete ways to fulfil the commitment made to Palestine refugees.

17. UNRWA had invested significant time in exploring different avenues to achieve financial stability. In coordination with the Secretary-General and donor partners, major outreach efforts had been undertaken with non-traditional donors over the previous 18 months. The Agency was also in contact with the World Bank about collaborating on trust fund financing for education. In recent years, it had tapped into private, charitable and foundation resources, and was leaving no stone unturned in the quest for broad and diverse support.

18. It was very encouraging to see the commitments made by Member States in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The Agency's crippling financial situation and the many discussions on how to address it presented a timely opportunity to initiate implementation of the Declaration with regard to Palestine refugees.

19. Approximately half of the Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA were young people under the age of 25. Beyond the nine or ten years of education obtained by 500,000 boys and girls in UNRWA schools, very few could contemplate real opportunities in life, which was unacceptable and deeply concerning in an environment where currents of extremism swept through the region. The international community had a collective responsibility to protect Palestine refugee youth from such risks. A remarkable institution in the education system was UNRWA's school parliaments. School parliamentarians in UNRWA's five fields of operations were democratically elected students whose

activities revealed a spirit of civic responsibility. Five of them had recently addressed an UNRWA senior management meeting. During the Secretary-General's most recent visit to Gaza in June 2016, he had met with the central school parliament of Gaza. Those exchanges had revealed that the students sometimes understood better than adults that the education provided by UNRWA schools was not an act of charity, but an exercise of a right.

Interactive dialogue

20. **Mr. Roet** (Israel) said that his Government would continue to support the Agency's humanitarian activities, but believed that those activities could be carried out in a much more effective way. It was regrettable that the Organization's important work was overshadowed by its constant use of humanitarian funding for the purposes of advocacy and promotion of the Palestinian narrative. Unfortunately, both the Commissioner-General's statement and his report (A/71/13) had provided an unbalanced and inaccurate description of the situation of Palestine refugees throughout the Middle East. UNRWA was mandated to promote the welfare of Palestine refugees but that mandate did not allow it to conduct itself in a way that promoted a one-sided, biased approach. His delegation strongly objected to the comparison made between Israel and Syria as a result of the Commissioner-General's remark that Jordan, unlike those two countries, was the only field of operations in which UNRWA could focus on its core activities.

21. The Commissioner-General's report also failed to include information about the ten or more UNRWA employees who had been actively inciting violence against Israelis on social media. Israel had provided a detailed account of the situation in 2015, but had only received the vague response that the issue was under investigation. His delegation wondered when the Agency, which preached about the need for accountability, would show greater transparency and reveal the findings of its investigation, how it had addressed that serious situation and the steps it would take to prevent it from reoccurring.

22. The report referred to the volatile security situation in Gaza, which was partially attributed to the constant firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, but failed to mention who was responsible for those attacks and merely alluded to the de facto authorities. His delegation requested the Commissioner-General to clarify the identity of the so-called de facto authorities, and to explain why the Agency could not speak about Hamas and its activities. Doing so would send the right message and might

assist Palestine refugees under the control of a terrorist organization. The report failed to mention Hamas terrorist activities, the theft of rehabilitation material or the horrific human rights situation of the people of Gaza. On the other hand, it indicated that there had been a lack of progress towards reconstruction in Gaza. That cynical choice of words contradicted what had been reported by other United Nations agencies, and did not mention the support provided by Israel in that reconstruction. While much remained to be done, that criticism was uncalled for and was constant in the report.

23. With regard to the restrictions on the movement of goods into and out of Gaza, the report highlighted the additional costs incurred by the Agency in monitoring the movement of construction material, but did not take into account the broader context and the security considerations which had led to their introduction. Hamas regularly confiscated, diverted and smuggled materials intended for the reconstruction of Gaza and used them to dig tunnels, build training camps and manufacture rockets. Blaming Israel for protecting itself might allow UNRWA staff easier access into Gaza but it would not help the Palestinian people.

24. The report criticized the restrictions on the movement of UNRWA personnel and the vehicle searches at crossings. However, Israel had legitimate security concerns, and the restrictions had been imposed because of real threats. The constant firing of rockets and the several tunnels which had collapsed during the reporting period attested to the fact that Hamas was actively preparing for another conflict. Moreover, Hamas had been known to exploit humanitarian agencies and divert materials to strengthen its military capabilities. In October 2016, humanitarian workers from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations had been indicted for assisting Hamas.

25. The section of the report addressing the situation in Syria indicated that aid deliveries to the Yarmouk refugee camp had been cut off and that access to adjacent areas had been suspended, but failed to mention that the camp had been besieged by the Syrian Government. Of the 40 UNRWA staff members killed in 2016, 14 had been killed in Syria, where, as at December 2015, an additional 28 had been missing, detained, kidnapped or presumed to have been detained. He expressed his condolences to UNRWA and to the families of those killed and hoped for the early return of the staff missing in Syria.

26. The report did not address who was responsible for harming UNRWA staff, and his Government wished to know whether there had been an investigation into those employees' well-being. In stark contrast with its sections on Israel, the report did not attribute any wrongdoing to any faction, organization or individual. The Commissioner-General should clarify who had kidnapped no fewer than 30 UNRWA staff members and who was responsible for the killing of 14 others. The international community needed to know, and the Agency should report the facts as they were without political consideration. His delegation wished to know whether accountability was required only of one Member State or of all States.

27. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the United Nations had a permanent responsibility to ensure that the question of Palestine was justly resolved and the rights of the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees, were fulfilled in accordance with the rules and principles of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. The mandate of UNRWA constituted a major component of that responsibility, and her delegation appreciated the Agency's vital humanitarian work in support of the Palestine refugees over nearly seven decades.

28. It was difficult to understand how calls for justice, dignity and rights, including for Palestine refugees, could be seen as one-sided or biased. Only a just solution would enable the Palestinian people to overcome the grave injustices that they had endured for far too long and provide for stability, security and peace in the Middle East and beyond. The Commissioner-General had demonstrated adept leadership and had undertaken significant outreach efforts in the face of persistent structural underfunding, recurrent financial shortfalls and deteriorating socioeconomic, humanitarian and security conditions.

29. Although an overwhelming majority of Palestine refugees had stayed in the region for years, awaiting a just solution to their plight, worsening conditions had compelled many to leave in search of security and a better life. The Commissioner-General was requested to provide further information on that trend, including statistics on the refugee exodus. In addition, her delegation wondered what actions the Agency had undertaken to address the vulnerabilities of the Palestine refugee population, in particular as a result of the Syrian crisis, and to provide stability within that community.

30. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) asked the Commissioner-General how the Agency's relief and

development work contributed to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals with respect to the Palestine refugee population. His delegation also wished to know what immediate coping strategies had been or would be implemented by the Agency to expand or diversify its donor base in the face of serious funding difficulties.

31. **Ms. Dris** (Malaysia) asked the Commissioner-General to provide further information on the situation of Palestine refugees residing in Syrian camps, as well as of those who had fled the Syrian Arab Republic to camps in Lebanon, Jordan and elsewhere in the region. Her delegation also wished to know how the Agency was supporting the Palestine refugees remaining in the Syrian Arab Republic in terms of shelter, health care, education and other essential humanitarian services.

32. **Mr. Krähenbühl** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) said that the Agency had been given a clear mandate to protect Palestine refugees in its various areas of operation. That included engaging in dialogue with all relevant parties, including the Israeli security forces, Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and the Governments of Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan, on issues relating to the respect, or lack of respect, of the rights of those refugees. The Agency's first course of action was always to raise matters of concern with the Governments and responsible actors on the ground by initiating face-to-face dialogue. Public advocacy and raising awareness of the situation of Palestine refugees was standard practice for UNRWA and would continue to be part of the Agency's work.

33. The Agency had acknowledged and documented the staff social media posts inciting violence. However, given that such conduct concerned only 0.5 per cent of staff members, the practice could hardly be said to be widespread. It was nonetheless considered serious and the Agency held itself accountable. It had engaged with staff through training and other internal preventive measures to highlight what was acceptable in their public and private use of social media.

34. In response to the claim by the Israeli representative that UNRWA reports failed to refer to Hamas, he recalled his lengthy experience in international humanitarian law, one of the distinct features of which compared to other types of international law was its universal applicability to both State and non-State actors. He had no reservations when it came to referring to any armed group and was the only senior United Nations official to have condemned the firing of rockets from Gaza during the 2014 war.

35. UNRWA treated the theft of Agency construction material as a very serious matter and had engaged frequently with the Israeli Government and security forces to determine whether there was any evidence that Agency materials had been used in the construction of tunnels in Gaza. Inspections had been carried out at the end of the 2014 war and the security forces had indicated clearly that there was no such evidence. He had accepted that response as an official position but would nonetheless continue to follow up on any future allegations made. He was the first to step in to take corrective action if it was needed.

36. The Israeli representative had misunderstood his comment regarding the lack of reconstruction in the Gaza Strip. The Agency had received only 39 per cent of the funding necessary to rebuild and could complete light reconstruction in just six months if it had the resources it had requested. The homes of approximately 9,000 Palestinian refugee families in the Gaza Strip had been fully destroyed and, in addition to financial constraints, the Agency had faced further challenges in rebuilding as a result of the import restrictions imposed by Israel on wood and other items that the country had listed as dual-use items. His comments to that effect had been purely factual and had been intended to explain why reconstruction could not advance or be completed; they had not been intended as criticism.

37. With regard to the movement restrictions imposed by Israel on both Agency staff and Palestine refugees, Israel clearly faced real security issues. However, every State involved in armed conflict was responsible for reconciling the security measures taken to protect its citizens with its obligations under international humanitarian law. The blockade of Gaza amounted to collective punishment, and the Government of Israel should realize that there were consequences to the measures it had taken to protect its security.

38. The Agency had no doubt that the Syrian Government was responsible for the siege of Yarmouk, nor had it failed to address that fact. Since the beginning of the Syrian war, 18 of its staff members had been killed and another 25 were missing. In addition, 11 colleagues had been killed during the 50-day conflict in Gaza. It was deeply troubling to have incurred so many losses in Gaza and the Syrian Arab Republic, but it was not his place to lay blame on any particular party. In Gaza, that was a matter of public record. In the case of the Syrian Arab Republic, it was difficult to identify the party responsible. In instances where staff members were presumed to be held in Government detention centres, he had

intervened at senior levels with Government officials and had obtained some releases. However, responsibility was not limited to a single actor in the international system or in UNRWA practice, and in its dialogue with Israel the Agency would always point to specific cases for which it believed Israel was accountable.

39. An estimated 120,000 of the 560,000 Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic had fled the country, of whom 31,000 were now in Lebanon and 16,000 were now in Jordan. Both countries had since closed their borders to Palestine refugees, and those forced to flee the Syrian Arab Republic were now taking the northern route via Turkey. A few thousand had stayed there; a few thousand more had gone to Egypt and another thousand had gone to Gaza. In summer 2016, between 35,000 and 45,000 Palestine refugees had joined Syrians and other refugees and migrants on the way to Europe. It was difficult to document how many Palestine refugees had arrived in Europe because many had Syrian travel documents. The conflict in the Middle East could cause higher numbers of both Palestine and Syrian refugees to be displaced if the underlying causes were not addressed. European countries had seen worrying increases in the numbers of refugees arriving from the Middle East and those countries in particular should bear in mind that if UNRWA continued to be seriously underfunded and Palestinians continued to be faced with a closed political horizon and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, higher numbers would move elsewhere.

40. Of the Palestine refugees remaining in the Syrian Arab Republic, around 60 per cent had been displaced. Before the war, refugees had achieved a degree of self-sufficiency and dignity through access to employment. Although they had been sending their children to Agency schools, they ran businesses, shops and markets in Yarmouk and had been able to cover the needs of their families. However, 95 per cent of that refugee community was now dependent on Agency aid, which was focused on emergency response to basic needs such as medical care, food and cash distribution, and education. Education for Palestine refugees was vital and, in a demonstration of their resolve to keep their opportunities open, 80 per cent of the 3,000 Palestine refugees that had sat the national examinations in the Syrian Arab Republic had passed.

41. UNRWA was making a significant contribution to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 through long-term efforts in education, primary health care and other key areas. It had implemented cost-cutting measures, such as reductions in staff travel, and was seeking ways to sustain and diversify its funding

base. Efforts to engage with the Gulf countries had been very successful over the previous decade, but the Agency was also working to build new partnerships with the World Bank and other actors, and to strengthen the support from countries such as Brazil, China, India and the Republic of Korea.

42. **Mr. Roet** (Israel) said that he had misheard the information given on the number of UNRWA staff members killed, but even one was too many and his delegation expressed its condolences for the loss of Agency workers regardless of where they had been killed and hoped for the return of missing staff members. The restrictions on the movement of Agency staff members had been imposed because of legitimate security concerns. It was unfortunate that several of his questions remained unanswered; in particular, the Commissioner-General had not explained why Hamas was not mentioned in his report.

43. In terms of advocacy, there was a plethora of United Nations agencies, organizations and other actors responsible for addressing issues surrounding the question of Palestine, and their high number meant that Palestine represented one of the loudest voices in the United Nations system. The mandate of UNRWA was to help Palestine refugees, and that is what it should do.

44. **Mr. Krühenbühl** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) said that he welcomed the expression of condolences for the loss of UNRWA staff. It was clear that UNRWA and the State of Israel had different perspectives on certain issues, but he had always been keen to engage in dialogue with Israeli representatives from the Permanent Mission in New York or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and with senior Israeli military officials. Although not all differences in perspective could be resolved, both parties could address the matters at hand in a very serious way, and he looked forward to ongoing dialogue in that regard.

Statement by the Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA

45. **Mr. Halvorsen** (Norway), introducing the report of the Working Group (A/71/350), said that the Working Group was seriously concerned at the dire financial situation of UNRWA, which faced a shortfall of \$74 million. Several donors had provided additional contributions and the Agency had implemented measures to improve the cost effectiveness of its programmes even further, but there was still a gap to bridge. The General Assembly and the international community were responsible for ensuring that the

Agency could fulfil its mandate and maintain its services at an acceptable level.

46. Concerned at the multiplication of crises and their impact on the Agency's operations and funding, the Working Group urged all Governments to increase their contributions to the Agency, in particular to its programme budget. Government contributions should keep pace with the requirement for the Agency to meet the growing needs of the Palestine refugee population and should take into account the effects of inflation and other factors driving the costs of providing services. In addition, all Governments should provide unearmarked multi-year funding, make sustained and predictable contributions to the Agency in line with the recommendations made at the World Humanitarian Summit, and disburse their contributions early in the year when feasible. That type of support would allow the Agency to better plan its activities.

47. The Agency should continue to implement measures to increase its efficiency while maintaining the quality of its services to Palestine refugees, and Member States should provide strong financial support for those efforts. Governments that had traditionally shown generosity towards Palestine refugees and to the Agency were urged to do their utmost to maintain or increase their funding to the Agency, and all Member States were encouraged to positively consider the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the management capacity of UNRWA (A/67/365) and all resolutions relating to the financing of the Agency with a view to addressing recurring budget deficits and sufficiently supporting the Agency's vital work.

48. The Working Group invited all Member States to consider its recommendations when assessing funding for UNRWA in 2017 and beyond. The Agency had made progress in its efforts to contain its costs; Member States should accompany those measures with adequate funding.

General debate

49. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the 30,000 Palestine refugees employed by the Agency were proof that refugees should be seen as agents for good, not as burdens, and that the Agency's remarkable work in harmonizing humanitarian and development aid could serve as a model for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The plight of Palestine refugees was a painful reminder that unresolved conflicts did not simply disappear with time, but were instead exacerbated in the absence of just solutions.

Despite years of exile and the continued denial of their rights, the Palestine refugees remained resolute in their legitimate aspirations, convinced that international law and the arc of history would restore their rights.

50. States had a political, legal and moral obligation to uphold the commitments made in the New York Declaration by providing the world's millions of refugees and migrants with the humanitarian assistance that they needed, protecting their rights in accordance with international law and addressing the root causes of their displacement. The Palestine refugees must not be excluded from the rights and commitments affirmed in that Declaration. UNRWA, widely recognized as a stabilizing factor in the tumultuous region, had helped to alleviate the hardships of the Palestine refugees and had been a lifeline through cycles of conflict and upheaval. However, the longevity of its assistance to the Palestine refugees had only been possible thanks to the cooperation and support of donor and host countries.

51. In Jordan, the situation of the Palestine refugees remained stable, but needs had continued to grow as rising unemployment and poverty had left some 80 per cent of refugees struggling to meet basic needs. In Lebanon, pervasive instability, abject poverty and a lack of opportunities continued to have a severe impact on Palestine refugees, especially those who had fled the Syrian Arab Republic. Her delegation appreciated the Agency's continued efforts to increase refugees' access to the Lebanese labour market and its rebuilding of the Nahr el-Bared camp, but donor support was needed to assist the thousands still without shelter and to expedite completion of the reconstruction.

52. In Gaza, the punitive, unlawful Israeli blockade had caused aid dependency among most of the population. Without humanitarian assistance, even the most basic needs could not be met and socioeconomic conditions were at their lowest point since occupation had begun in 1967. Repeated military aggressions against the besieged Palestinian population had deepened the dire humanitarian crisis and increased reliance on UNRWA services for subsistence. Moreover, reconstruction — a humanitarian imperative for more than 60,000 displaced persons whose homes had been destroyed by the occupying Power in the 2014 conflict — remained painfully slow because of restrictions on the entry of essential construction materials.

53. In the West Bank, violent military raids by the occupying forces and other illegal practices such as house demolitions, forced displacements and movement restrictions, continued unabated. Such

actions had worsened the protection crisis for refugees, including Bedouins, who were at risk of forced displacement. The restrictions imposed by the occupying Power, together with frequent harassment and intimidation of Agency staff, continued to hamper UNRWA operations throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the situation of Palestine refugees remained alarming as the crisis intensified. Of the 560,000 Palestine refugees present prior to the conflict, 120,000 had fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Europe or elsewhere; of those who remained, 95 per cent were dependent on UNRWA assistance for survival. Her delegation praised the Agency for its ability to maintain operations under such difficult and dangerous circumstances.

54. States should respect the principles of non-refoulement and equal treatment of refugees, and should ensure access for all refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict, including the Palestine refugees. In addition, humanitarian access should be granted at all times. Armed conflict, including foreign occupation, did not absolve parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law, and UNRWA must be allowed to carry out its mandate without hindrance and without the imposition of additional costs or burdens. Furthermore, all parties should refrain from actions that could undermine or endanger the safety, security and neutrality of UNRWA installations and staff. In that regard, Israel should be held accountable for its grave violations during its military aggression against Gaza in 2014, during which several UNRWA facilities, including schools sheltering thousands of civilians, had been struck by the Israeli occupying forces, causing death, injury and destruction.

55. As a result of structural underfunding and constant financial shortfalls, the Agency's core programmes were at risk of being reduced or interrupted, and the General Assembly must find a sustainable solution to prevent that from happening. Palestine was grateful for the international community's longstanding support for UNRWA and for the contributions from donor countries, but only further sustained support could resolve the funding shortfalls that were undermining the Agency's capacity to provide refugees with essential assistance. Urgent consultations should be held with all stakeholders to identify measures to put UNRWA on a stable financial footing so that it could carry out its activities effectively and in a predictable manner.

56. Given the realities on the ground and the persistent funding gaps, the Agency's funding model — based primarily on voluntary contributions for its core

programmes — was not sustainable, and the international community had a collective responsibility to provide the Agency with the resources required to fulfil its mandate. Member States should support the draft resolution on the operations of UNRWA (A/C.4/71/L.9), which was aimed at ensuring continuity of assistance to the Palestine refugees in all fields of operation and ensuring the Agency's continued tangible contribution to regional stability.

57. The worsening plight of the Palestine refugees and the continued need for UNRWA underscored the need for a reinforced global commitment to uphold international law, engage proactively in conflict resolution and prevention, and tackle the root causes of forced and protracted displacement. Humanitarian assistance was imperative, but was not a solution. It was crucial to restore hope and a political horizon for the people in the region. To that end, Palestine called on the international community to mobilize the political will and action necessary to bring an end to the Israeli occupation and to achieve a just, comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, including a just solution for the Palestine refugees, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

58. **Mr. Arcia Vivas** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the Movement appreciated the tireless efforts, courage and dedication of UNRWA staff, who served in difficult and often dangerous conditions. Between 2011 and 2016, 30 staff members had lost their lives as a result of the conflict in the Middle East and another 35 were missing, detained; kidnapped or presumed to be detained. The Movement was seriously concerned at the violations of the immunity of UNRWA personnel and premises, and strongly condemned the killing of United Nations personnel and the destruction of United Nations premises. The mandated role of UNRWA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was essential in the absence of a just and lasting solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees that would include their rights under General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The Movement was gravely concerned at the critical situation of the refugees, whose lives the occupation continued to define adversely in every aspect, from security and freedom of movement to livelihoods and employment. Palestine refugees had continued to face serious protection challenges since 2014 and, in many places, faced existential threats, sinking deeper into poverty and desperation. The disastrous situation had been

exacerbated by the armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

59. The illegal and inhumane Israeli blockade of Gaza continued to cripple its economy and stifle the population, preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid and basic materials for reconstruction, thus obstructing economic and social recovery. To enable UNRWA personnel to discharge their humanitarian duties freely, the occupying Power must immediately lift all its illegal restrictions on free, sustained movement of persons and goods between Gaza and the outside world, in compliance with international law. The international community must uphold its moral, political and legal responsibilities to bring an end to Israel's illegal policies and its violations against the Palestinian people. Israel, the occupying Power, must abide by its obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention) and relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

60. The Movement was also concerned at the situation of the Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic and the further resulting displacement as thousands of them fled to other countries for safety, adding to the demands on UNRWA, particularly by increasing the need for emergency assistance. The Agency's persistent funding shortfall remained a concern, as it undermined its efforts to promote human development and meet refugees' needs in line with its medium-term strategy. It was imperative to close the gap between the needs of refugees and available resources. Urgent support from donors was therefore needed to support UNRWA programmes aimed at addressing the unemployment crisis, especially among Palestine refugee youth, and to enable the Agency to overcome its serious financial crisis, with increased expenditures arising from the grave socioeconomic and humanitarian situation and instability in all its fields of operation. The Movement thus continued to support General Assembly resolution 65/272 and encouraged efforts to explore the possibility of further funding from the Organization's regular budget.

61. The Movement supported the Agency's unwavering efforts to provide assistance to the Palestine refugees in all fields of operation despite many difficulties. However, the entire international community, in particular the Security Council, must intensify efforts to address the current political and humanitarian crisis and help advance credible peace negotiations towards an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the independence of a sovereign, contiguous and viable

State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as a just solution for the Palestine refugee problem in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

62. **Mr. Chatzisavas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Liechtenstein and the Republic of Moldova, said that UNRWA played a crucial role in the region and Member States were responsible for creating an enabling environment for the Agency and for assisting it in bringing greater sustainability to its operations.

63. The European Union remained the largest provider of international assistance to Palestine refugees, and its member States had contributed almost half of all donor support to the Agency's programme budget and about 33 per cent of all contributions to its overall operations. New donors were urged to help share the burden by supporting both the Agency and Palestine refugees. However, the securing of additional funds could not be the only solution sought to the Agency's financial crisis. The Agency had made welcome efforts to reduce its programme budget deficit but it should implement further initiatives that would secure a medium-term budget and financial stability while ensuring that services were being delivered to the most vulnerable refugees.

64. The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza was creating instability and constituted a recipe for renewed conflict. While all international donors should swiftly honour pledges made at the Cairo International Conference on Palestine: Reconstructing Gaza, political progress was also vital. Israel should end the blockade and open crossings into Gaza while addressing legitimate security concerns. The lifting of restrictions on the movement of people, services and goods, especially dual-use items, was needed to allow reconstruction, service delivery and international infrastructure projects. Both parties were urged to promote confidence- and trust-building measures, and the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian electricity agreement on 13 September was a welcome step in that regard. Improvement of the situation in the Gaza Strip would depend on intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the full assumption of all government functions there by the Palestinian Authority. All sides should respect the ceasefire, and the illicit arms build-up by Hamas and other militant groups should stop.

65. The crisis in Syria was exacting a terrible toll on Palestine refugees and UNRWA staff, and Palestine refugees were too often arbitrarily deprived of humanitarian assistance. The European Union condemned the continued systematic abuses of human rights and all violations of international humanitarian law by all parties, particularly the Syrian regime and its allies. A renewed cessation of hostilities, together with safe, comprehensive and unhindered access to all those in need of humanitarian assistance, and efforts to find a political solution in line with the provisions of relevant Security Council resolutions and the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012 could no longer be delayed.

66. The European Union acknowledged the massive efforts undertaken by countries in the region to manage the influx of refugees from Syria and would continue to support them as much as possible. It remained committed to supporting the Agency's work until a final and comprehensive settlement of the conflict had been reached. Regional partners could play a key role in changing the dynamics on the ground, including through discussions based on the Arab Peace Initiative. The European Union would continue working closely with the parties, Quartet partners and all other relevant stakeholders towards a two-State solution that would end the long-standing occupation and resolve all permanent status issues.

67. **Ms. Sughayar** (Jordan), noting with concern the persistent challenges facing UNRWA, said that the United Nations had a responsibility to provide the Agency — which it had mandated to provide services to Palestine refugees — with sustainable funding or to seek alternative sources of funding until lasting solutions to the refugee question and the broader question of Palestine had been found. The Agency's financial shortfall had been caused neither by an increase in the number of refugees nor by the Agency's continued provision of assistance but instead by the absence of a just and comprehensive solution to the refugee question. UNRWA did much more than provide basic services; it was the lifeline that fed the tenacity and resilience of over 5 million Palestine refugees, as well as an element of stability in a region repeatedly convulsed by unrest.

68. Without support from UNRWA, the repercussions for Palestine refugees would be inestimable, particularly for the young, who accounted for 50 per cent of all refugees. Furthermore, continuing to prevent that community from exercising its fundamental rights could drive some of its members to resort to violent extremism — an epidemic that already plagued the region. The attendant social disturbances tended to

disproportionately affect the young, and the current volatile circumstances would not withstand further stoking of tensions. Member States must therefore work to formulate a comprehensive security scheme for Palestine refugees that included protection and guaranteed their livelihood.

69. Given that the refugee question had yet to be resolved, Palestine refugees could not be stripped of the status of refugee, nor could their reality or that of the assistance provided to them by UNRWA be denied. Therefore, the entire international community — not just host or donor countries — had a duty to help refugees by funding the activities of humanitarian agencies and examining alternative methods of securing sustainable, regular funding for UNRWA. By doing so, Member States would effectively promote the humanitarian values they worked to instil in their own societies; conversely, those values should serve as an incentive to assist those agencies under a sustainable, multi-year framework.

70. Jordan welcomed donor country assistance to UNRWA and supported the Agency's efforts to mobilize resources, pursue reforms and establish partnerships with international financial institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations. Her Government had a strategic partnership with the Agency and was working to help it remedy its funding shortfall. As host country to 2 million registered Palestine refugees, Jordan granted Palestine refugees extensive opportunities and full civil, social and economic rights despite the country's limited resources and increasing pressure on its infrastructure. The Palestine refugee question, along with other core final status issues, was closely linked to her country's national interest. In that connection, initiatives taken by Jordan were aimed at putting an end to the Israeli occupation and bringing about the two-State solution, culminating in the establishment of a fully sovereign State of Palestine within 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Israeli occupation and the failure to uphold Palestinian rights constituted the only obstacles to achieving peace and resolving all final status issues. Funding for UNRWA must not be linked to the political complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the humanitarian role of the Agency must remain central. Investing in its sustainability was also an investment in the future of a generation of youth that UNRWA had enabled to persevere.

71. **Ms. Rodríguez Silva** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the Israeli occupation had inflicted tremendous suffering on the Palestinian people and continued to be a major cause of instability in the region and further afield. Not content with simply

oppressing Palestinians, Israel, the occupying Power, was intent on destroying all development opportunities and rendering the two-State solution impossible. Resolving the Palestinian humanitarian crisis was inextricably linked to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as that would allow the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination under a free, sovereign and independent State. In the meantime, UNRWA was stretched to capacity as increasing numbers of Palestine refugees were in dire need of its services.

72. Venezuela condemned Israel's aggressions against Palestinians and its indiscriminate exploitation of Palestinian natural resources, which severely limited opportunities for economic development in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It called on Israel to end those practices, including its illegal settlement activities, and to lift the inhumane blockade in Gaza, where abject poverty and unemployment were creating uncertainty and despair for young Palestinians. Lifting the blockade was essential to ensure the viability of a future State of Palestine.

73. The United Nations must act to stop Israel's systematic violations of Palestinians' rights, including its excessive use of force, movement restrictions, house demolitions and forced displacements, all of which occurred in an administrative and legal environment that discriminated against Palestinians but treated Israeli perpetrators with impunity. The perpetrators of those war crimes should be prosecuted in accordance with international law. In addition, the international community should provide additional funding to UNRWA so that it could continue its invaluable work. However, in view of Israel's continued aggressions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Gaza, and its apparent reluctance to assume its responsibilities under international law, other parallel measures were needed to protect Palestinians in the occupied territories, in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention and Security Council resolution 904 (1994).

74. Special attention should be paid to Palestinian children, who suffered disproportionately at the hands of the Israeli forces. UNRWA was doing commendable work in providing food, education and health care for those victims, but additional support from donors and Member States was needed. Furthermore, the international community should condemn Israel's illegal practices in the Occupied Territories and Gaza, and the Assembly and the Security Council should adopt firm resolutions calling on Israel to put an end to its illegal settlement activity and cease construction of the wall of shame. The Council's continued silence on

the matter implied complicity and support for the occupying Power's impunity.

75. The Venezuelan Government supported the two-State solution to the question of Palestine, and the establishment of a State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing side by side and in peace with Israel within 1967 borders. It also supported the efforts of the Quartet and called for a resumption of negotiations with a view to achieving a lasting settlement in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative. The State of Palestine should be granted full membership of the United Nations so that it could participate as an equal partner in peace talks, which was an essential step towards ending Israel's prolonged and illegal occupation.

76. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) said that UNRWA carried out vital work providing the 5 million Palestine refugees under its mandate with assistance in areas such as education and health care. In 2015, the Agency had educated 500,698 children, and the importance of the development aspect of that work could not be overstated. Not only did a quality education provide the most solid basis for development, but it also gave Palestine youth the much-needed hope to face the difficult conditions they had to endure daily. Furthermore, education was the first barrier against extremism and extremist thought.

77. The Agency's crucial development and humanitarian work could not be continued without adequate, predictable and sustainable funding, and his delegation called on international donors to maintain or even increase their generous support for the Agency. Egypt fully supported efforts to explore the possibility of further United Nations budgetary funding to UNRWA. The Agency had already exerted all possible efforts to ensure maximum efficiency and cost-effectiveness across its operations, and was working to engage new donors, including from the private sector, and strengthen its good relations with current donors.

78. **Ms. Samarasinghe** (Sri Lanka) said that the maintenance of schools and educational infrastructure and the high standard of education guaranteed by UNRWA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory encouraged children and youth to turn away from violence and aspire to a better future, even under the dire circumstances. Her Government was deeply concerned about the human rights situation and the daily violence and humiliation endured by Palestinian women and children. After nearly 10 years of a land and sea blockade and repeated escalations of

hostilities, and in spite of limited educational opportunities, unemployment, lack of access to health care and other challenges, the Agency's work provided Palestinians living in Gaza with a semblance of hope.

79. Noting with concern the vulnerability and particular hardships suffered by Palestine refugees, she stressed that the principle of non-refoulement must be honoured with regard to those refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict, which had created large-scale movements of people and placed an added burden on the Agency. UNRWA had recently faced the most serious financial crisis in its history; its continued underfunding would give rise to a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions and would threaten the services rendered to the Palestinian people, with serious consequences for peace and security in an especially volatile region. The international community must therefore increase its contributions so that the Agency could continue its work.

80. Her delegation commended UNRWA staff for their courage and dedication in carrying out the Agency's mandate in dangerous circumstances, and categorically condemned all threats and attacks against United Nations personnel and premises. While Sri Lanka fully supported the Agency's work, a just and peaceful political solution was the only legitimate means of securing the future of Palestine refugees, and her Government supported the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the achievement of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders.

81. **Ms. Horsandi** (Israel) said that her country had always cooperated with UNRWA and had coordinated hundreds of projects that provided essential services to the Palestinian people. While UNRWA made a significant contribution to the welfare of Palestine refugees and their descendants, its alarming political agenda overshadowed its humanitarian activities. In stark contrast to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which had helped millions of refugees to restart their lives and provided a brighter future for the coming generations, UNRWA kept Palestinians in a perpetuated refugee status. By the Agency's count, the number of refugees had grown from hundreds of thousands at its inception to the over 5 million so-called refugees eligible for UNRWA services 66 years later. However, the UNHCR rule that a person who had taken residence in and become a citizen of another country would lose refugee status, if applied by UNRWA, would reduce the figure dramatically. Only in the Palestinian case did that restriction not apply.

82. The UNRWA education system promoted a one-sided narrative and fuelled false promises among new generations. Schools displayed maps showing so-called Palestine that ignored the existence of the State of Israel. Moreover, Palestinian children were encouraged to believe that the so-called right of return was the only solution, a belief symbolized by the decorative keys kept in many UNRWA camps. Instead of giving new generations keys to the past that only reinforced a distorted reality, the Agency should give them keys to the future, in keeping with its goal of fostering human development among Palestine refugees, by instilling tolerance in children instead of hatred. Education provided the promise of a better future for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

83. Once again, UNRWA had failed to uphold the standard of balanced and neutral reporting expected of United Nations bodies. The Agency's illegitimate political advocacy and its spokesperson's one-sided, provocative statements served the Palestinian narrative and agenda, to the detriment of UNRWA beneficiaries. Moreover, its report virtually avoided mention of the extremist terrorist organization Hamas, which viciously controlled the Gaza Strip, diverted humanitarian resources to rearmament and terror build-up, endangered the lives of Palestinian civilians and committed war crimes by using civilian areas to target Israeli citizens. UNRWA continuously called for accountability and transparency, and Israel expected the Agency to abide by those same standards in fulfilling its reporting obligations. Its report should therefore make clear that Hamas bore responsibility for the situation on the ground.

84. In cooperation with UNRWA, her Government was doing its utmost to improve the humanitarian conditions and standard of living of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip while safeguarding the basic security needs of Israeli citizens. Through the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, it had enabled the shipment of over 6 million tons of building materials into Gaza. Despite the sharp increase in attempts to smuggle illicit items into the territory, Israel continued to facilitate the provision of equipment, materials and supplies to help rebuild Gaza. Nevertheless, its extensive cooperation with UNRWA was scarcely mentioned in that year's report, which paid much more attention to the situation of Palestine refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip than to the desperate plight of Palestine refugees fleeing Syria and the hurdles faced by UNRWA beneficiaries and workers in that country. It was disheartening that criticism of Israel took precedence over seeking ways to improve the situation of so many people. Her country sincerely

hoped that creating an environment conducive to enhanced economic activity would encourage the resumption of direct, unconditional negotiations leading to two States for two peoples, living side by side in peace and security.

85. In the light of the actual needs of Palestine refugees, caught in the turmoil that reigned in the Middle East, it was troubling that UNRWA continued to channel a significant portion of its budget to inflammatory political campaigns, at the expense of humanitarian assistance. The time had come to seize the opportunity borne by the winds of change blowing through the Middle East. Instead of another round of biased resolutions, her delegation encouraged the Agency to pursue a more constructive agenda in the service of a better future.

86. **Mr. Sandoval Mendiola** (Mexico) said that the humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA to the Palestinian populations throughout the Near East was particularly important given the fragile security situation in the region, especially in Syria. The Agency's programmes were forced to operate in one of the worst humanitarian crises of the century, amidst mass displacement, civilian casualties and extensive damage to homes and civilian infrastructure. Member States must therefore work together to help resolve regional conflicts and establish a sustainable and lasting peace. In response to the Agency's funding shortfall, her Government had contributed \$250,000 to its 2016 budget. Mexico remained committed to a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through recognition of the right of the State of Israel to exist and the establishment of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State within secure, internationally recognized borders, in line with Security Council resolutions.

87. **Ms. Pereira Sotomayor** (Ecuador) said that UNRWA staff worked courageously in extremely difficult conditions without the security afforded by the immunity normally enjoyed by the United Nations, its property, premises and personnel under the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. In that connection, Ecuador called on Israel, Syria and Saudi Arabia to abide by international law and abandon policies that hindered or delayed the Agency's humanitarian activities, which were a crucial element of regional stability.

88. The sharp rise in forced displacement had been met with reluctance on the part of certain countries to admit migrants and refugees. As a host country that had granted refugee status to over 60,000 people — the most in any Latin American country — Ecuador

protected the human rights of its refugee population. All persons displaced by the events of 1967 and the subsequent hostilities had the right to return to their homes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as well as the rights to self-determination, independence, sovereignty and recovery of their possessions; moreover, the principle of non-refoulement must be upheld in respect of Palestine refugees.

89. Numerous reports attested to growing regional instability and an upsurge in violence, marginalization and poverty in Palestine refugee communities. The Occupied Palestinian Territory was a hotbed of frustration and poverty. Deprived of all its rights, the Palestinian people lived in a state of moral and material annihilation, in dire need of continued assistance from UNRWA. Sufficient and predictable funding for the Agency's activities was therefore of the essence. Her delegation valued the generosity of the donors whose contributions had made it possible to overcome the Agency's funding shortfall. It also commended the Secretariat for its important role in facilitating consultations between intergovernmental bodies and private entities in order to identify additional sources of funding.

90. Seven decades after the founding of the United Nations, it was clear that peace was much more than the absence of war; above all, peace was defined by the presence of justice, dignity and development — ideals to which the Palestinian people, frustrated by the lack of political progress towards a negotiated two-State solution, could hardly aspire. The absence of political will to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions and the indifference and indolence of the powers directly involved had forced Palestinians to survive in a protracted illegal situation. It was essential to determine the respective responsibilities of the United Nations and of other States, as well as the available legal means to put an end to the serious violations of international law. In closing, her delegation paid homage to Palestinians and Israelis who had lost their lives in the tragic conflict, as well as to United Nations staff members fallen in the line of duty in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Syrian Arab Republic.

91. **Mr. Chaichana** (Thailand), commending the Agency's invaluable work in providing humanitarian assistance to and fostering the human development of over 5 million Palestinians, said that the threats against UNRWA personnel and premises were alarming. His delegation was also concerned at the persistent funding shortfalls, which had undermined the Agency's ability to meet the needs of Palestine refugees, and it therefore called on Member States to provide sustained support

to UNRWA. His Government had made regular financial contributions to UNRWA since 1978 and had responded to the Agency's flash appeal for Gaza after the 2014 conflict. Moreover, it had collaborated with Japan to build Palestinian capacity in human resources management and tourism, as part of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development.

92. The fact that UNRWA was still providing assistance on the ground after 66 years of existence was a regrettable sign that sustainable peace remained elusive in the Middle East. Thailand urged the parties to make every effort to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable solution to the conflict through constructive negotiations, and it stood ready to alleviate the hardships of Palestine refugees and to support international initiatives to bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

93. **Mr. Almehairi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the services provided by UNRWA to Palestine refugees were especially vital in the light of the violence racking the region and exacerbating the refugee crisis. Moreover, the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, forced displacement and rise in home demolitions had caused Palestinian living standards to deteriorate. The state of despair among Palestine refugees had prompted many of them to flee on dangerous paths, while refugee youth were particularly vulnerable to being recruited and exploited by extremist groups. Those dire circumstances increased demand for UNRWA services. Member States must therefore maintain their support of the Agency and broaden its donor base.

94. The United Arab Emirates made an annual voluntary contribution of \$1.8 million to the Agency's operational budget. In addition, it had pledged an additional \$5 million in 2015 and \$15 million in 2016 and 2017 in support of educational programmes for Palestine refugee students. Its contributions were also aimed at mitigating the psychological impact of armed conflict on the refugee student population and providing food assistance to the thousands of Palestine refugees affected by the Syrian conflict. Furthermore, his country was a member of the Agency's Advisory Commission and Steering Committee for the Resource Mobilization Strategy. While such contributions were beneficial, the only way to put an end to the suffering of Palestine refugees was to fundamentally resolve the refugee question in the context of a settlement of the question of Palestine. To that end, his delegation called on the international community to redouble its efforts to compel Israel to end its illegal occupation of Arab territories and comply with the relevant international

resolutions, especially General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.



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Summary record of the 22nd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 3 November 2016, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Maleki (Vice-Chair) (Islamic Republic of Iran)
later: Mr. Drobnjak (Chair) (Croatia)

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In the absence of Mr. Drobnyak (Croatia), Mr. Maleki (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 49: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(continued) (A/71/13, A/71/335, A/71/340, A/71/343 and A/71/350)

1. **Mr. Zehnder** (Switzerland) said that his delegation, concerned by the repeated violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law committed in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, called for greater protection and accountability. All parties to the conflict were obligated to ensure the rapid and unobstructed passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need.
2. The risk of isolated and distressed people becoming radicalized or choosing to escape desperate conditions was high given the ongoing deterioration of the security, political and socioeconomic situation in the region. It was therefore of critical importance that UNRWA continue to play a stabilizing role by maintaining an adequate level of its services. UNRWA had been repeatedly underfunded over the past decade, leaving its short-term coping mechanisms exhausted and limiting the Agency's capacity to provide quality services to Palestine refugees. UNRWA was almost completely dependent on voluntary contributions, which did not keep pace with either the growing number of refugees or the increasing need in the region. In that light, he encouraged efforts targeted at ensuring sufficient, predictable and sustained funding of the Agency for the duration of its mandate. Such efforts could include consultations with Member States, international financial institutions and United Nations stakeholders with a view to securing enhanced support. That included voluntary as well as assessed contributions.
3. Switzerland would continue to support UNRWA reforms, in particular its resource-mobilization strategy, as well as the systematic implementation of its protection framework. His Government stood ready to contribute to a longer-term consultative process on the Agency's funding structure aimed at ensuring adequate assistance and protection to Palestine refugees. Switzerland was also committed to supporting UNRWA efforts to promote the respect of the rights of Palestine refugees until a negotiated and lasting solution was reached.
4. **Mr. AlJarallah** (Kuwait) said that his delegation greatly appreciated the efforts of UNRWA, but was

concerned that the funding shortfall would impair the Agency's ability to deliver services in fulfilment of its mandate. He stressed the need to find more innovative ways of enabling the United Nations regular budget to cover the Agency's escalating costs. The shortfall placed a particular burden on countries that hosted UNRWA operations.

5. The report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/71/13) had detailed the suffering of Palestine refugees as a result of the control exerted by the Israeli occupation over every aspect of their lives. His country renewed its call on the international community to pressure Israel, the occupying Power, to comply with international resolutions and to cease its systematic destruction of Palestinian infrastructure and ongoing violations of the most basic human rights. He also called on the international community to implement the relevant resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 194 (III), paragraph 11, which affirmed the right of return for Palestine refugees. The alternative was to put Palestinian youth, who had lost all hope for a life of dignity, at risk of recruitment by terrorist organizations.
6. Over the years, his country had contributed over \$169 million to UNRWA. Most recently, it had made an emergency donation of \$15 million to ensure continued schooling for some 500,000 Palestinian students. Over the preceding four years, Kuwait had also allocated \$50 million to support Palestine refugees in Syria. In 2009, it had contributed \$24 million after Israel, the occupying Power, had destroyed some 36 UNRWA schools in Gaza. He was pleased to reconfirm his country's pledge of \$200 million over the next three years made at the 2014 Cairo International Conference on Palestine: Reconstructing Gaza. As a member of the UNRWA Advisory Commission, Kuwait would continue to make its voluntary annual contribution, which it had increased to \$2 million as of 2011.
7. **Mr. Zaayman** (South Africa) said that his Government had contributed \$218,812 to UNRWA which, in testament to the commitment of the international community, had educated over 500,000 children, and provided primary health care consultations to over 9.1 million and social safety net assistance to 290,000 people in the past year in addition to ensuring that over 36,000 shelters were rehabilitated or constructed.
8. That notwithstanding, the particularly dire situation in the Gaza Strip made it essential for the international community to continue providing

financial support to the Agency. South Africa would continue to provide financial support to the Palestinian people through the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility Fund for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (IBSA Fund) and, in cooperation with the Palestinian authorities and other international organizations, it would support projects in Nablus and Gaza. In the former, his Government was involved in a project which, once operational, would offer activities for adults with disabilities, including vocational training. And in Gaza, the IBSA Fund had provided support to rehabilitate the Cultural and Hospital Centre for the Palestinian Red Crescent Society in the Gaza Strip.

9. To rejuvenate the trade-oriented and aid-dependent Gaza economy, it was crucial that the blockade be lifted. South Africa was particularly concerned by the effect of the coastal blockade on the fisheries industry, which had the potential to create jobs and foster economic growth. As concluded in the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, it was incumbent upon the international community to address the humanitarian issues faced by Palestine refugees. Ending the 50-year illegal occupation of Palestine must be a priority in that regard. The international community should encourage the parties to restart negotiations to that end, which should be accomplished through the adoption of a lasting and viable peace settlement ensuring a fully fledged Palestinian State existing side-by-side with Israel, within internationally recognized borders. His Government strongly supported calls for 2017 to be declared the International Year to End Israeli Occupation. That would assist in preserving the two-State solution and providing lasting security for Israel and Palestine.

10. **Mr. Ben Sliman** (Tunisia) said that challenges on the operational level and ongoing regional turmoil placed an ever-increasing strain on the services provided by UNRWA. That was in addition to continued financial constraints and the harsh measures imposed by Israeli authorities. The lives of Palestine refugees continued to be severely affected by the brutal Israeli occupation. With more than a quarter living in poverty and facing unemployment, they were in dire need of humanitarian aid. Moreover, half a million school-aged children were in need of quality education.

11. The worrisome 10-year blockade of Gaza, which amounted to collective punishment, was a blatant violation of international humanitarian law. In Gaza, people's access to humanitarian aid, basic health care and reconstruction materials was still hindered, impeding economic and social recovery. Nearly half of the households there remained without food security or regular access to clean water and electricity.

12. The occupation by Israel, the harsh living conditions it imposed, as well as its denial of the fundamental right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, were at the core of the question of Palestine. The time had come for the international community, in particular the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibility and put an end to the Israeli occupation, especially as the current situation threatened to give way to further tensions in a region already fraught with conflict and instability.

13. **Mr. Rivero Rosario** (Cuba) said that UNRWA now faced its gravest financial crisis since its establishment, a situation that endangered the existence of 700 schools in the Middle East. Ensuring that half a million children continued to receive an education deserved the consideration of the international community. Despite the financial difficulties and the challenges confronting it, including restricted movements and obstructed access to zones of operation, the Agency continued to achieve much in the area of education, health care and protection. The violations of human rights and international instruments by Israeli armed and security forces should cease.

14. Cuba wished to reaffirm its unequivocal solidarity with the Palestinian people and joined those who called for an end to the long-standing, unjust and illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel. The cruel blockade of the Gaza Strip should be eliminated without condition, the movement of persons facilitated and the difficulties faced by Palestine refugees resolved, all in accordance with the standards and principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

15. His Government would continue to support the fight of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and to establish their own independent and sovereign State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

16. **Ms. Ziade** (Lebanon) said that the protracted refugee and crisis situation should not be forgotten. There were 5.2 million Palestine refugees, accounting for more than 40 per cent of long-term refugees worldwide. They were scattered in the occupied State of Palestine and neighbouring host countries and faced political, social and economic uncertainties. UNRWA remained a stabilizing factor for them.

17. For over six decades, many thousands of Palestine refugees had benefited from UNRWA services, including education, primary health care, relief and social services, infrastructure and camp improvement. But the core existence of the Agency and its ability to deliver services were jeopardized by a

chronic shortfall in funds in its core budget programme. Its dire financial situation was exacerbated by tightened measures and restrictions imposed by Israel, impacting the quality of services provided by the Agency to the 1.3 million refugees under siege in Gaza and the 800,000 living in the West Bank.

18. The international community should ensure the financial stability of the UNRWA budget and increase the predictability of the Agency's resources, which would strengthen the services provided to those refugees and restore their trust in the Agency. Lebanon stood ready to continue working constructively with partners to ensure a sound financial budget that would enable UNRWA to fulfil its mandate. Only a strong and reliable Agency would enhance the resilience of Palestine refugees pending further efforts by the international community to achieve a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

19. Lebanon was hosting 400,000 Palestine refugees and 30,000 Palestine refugees fleeing the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, representing almost 10 per cent of the population. Those refugees continued to face multiple challenges, including lack of financial resources, minimal health services, interruption of other primary services provided by UNRWA, overcrowding of the 12 densely populated refugee camps, and the erosion of hope in the peace process or the two-State solution. Lebanon had borne witness to the severe impact on the Palestine refugees and their host communities of the decline and severe reduction in UNRWA services as a result of continued structural and chronic financial shortfalls. In that regard, the competent Lebanese authorities had been working and would continue to work closely with UNRWA to address the needs of those refugees in full compliance with Lebanon's Constitution and legal framework.

20. Lebanon had been working with Palestinian representatives through the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee to address socioeconomic and security challenges. Lebanon, a country where resettlement was contrary to the Constitution, had made strides in that direction, including the adoption of a law to regulate the access of Palestinians to the Lebanese labour market, improved education and strengthened security measures. Much remained to be done, however, and Lebanon could not face the task alone.

21. During the February donor conference in London, the Lebanese delegation had included the reconstruction of the Nahr El Bared camp in its presentation on urgent national infrastructure needs.

22. She wished to reiterate her country's appreciation for the generosity of donors from Arab regional States,

Germany, and the latest European Union donation of 12 million euros in October. However, Lebanon was still \$120 million short of the required amount. The factors associated with prolonged displacement could destabilize its northern region. Moreover, the Nahr El-Bared relief services budget, which had already dwindled from \$18.8 million in 2010 to \$8.8 million in 2014, was expected to decrease further to \$5.3 million — a trend that was distressing to both the refugees and her Government, and which should be reversed in order to meet the refugees' growing needs.

23. Donors were once again urged to fully cover the UNRWA appeal for \$414 million in 2016 to meet the basic humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees fleeing the Syrian crisis. It was alarming that only 37 per cent of that appeal had been funded. Lebanon commended donors for their contributions and encouraged them to continue to assist the Agency.

24. Political will to resume the peace process based on the parameters set by the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant General Assembly resolutions, in particular resolution 194 (III), was urgently needed.

25. **Mr. Bin Momen** (Bangladesh) said that the sense of dispossession and injustice felt among Palestine refugees was further exacerbated by recurring armed attacks, violence, the expansion of settlements, and other human rights violations. Bangladesh was confident, however, that UNRWA could, under enabling circumstances, fulfil its mandate and commended the Agency's medium-term strategy for 2016-2021.

26. The safety and security of UNRWA staff was a matter of grave concern; there was no justification for the killing and abduction of United Nations personnel serving on the ground. Nor was there any excuse for the wanton destruction of emergency shelters, homes, schools and civilian infrastructure. The highest priority should be accorded to protecting United Nations personnel serving in any volatile or complex situation; Bangladesh urged the Security Council to remain seized of the matter.

27. Palestine refugees based in the Syrian Arab Republic were increasingly vulnerable and deserved more attention from the international community. He welcomed the efforts of UNRWA to cooperate with that host country and host communities, and called upon all concerned to ensure the Agency's unhindered access and assistance to the Palestine refugees.

28. The Agency, which was providing services to nearly 5.4 million Palestine refugees, required sufficient resources to respond to the growing need for

humanitarian and emergency services. However, it faced a financial shortfall of about \$74 million. The funding shortfall should not become a recurring problem. International donors were therefore urged to provide increased, predictable and sustainable contributions.

29. In line with its commitment to the international refugee protection regime, his Government would continue to advocate for Palestine refugees. Having experienced a large-scale refugee crisis, Bangladesh empathized with their plight. During the coming year, which would mark 50 years of the occupation, Member States were urged to implement special programmes and initiatives to reverse that situation. The international community should give due attention to the rights and needs of the Palestine refugees.

30. **Mr. Gunnarsson** (Iceland) said that it was unfortunate that the Committee must once again focus on the financial difficulties of UNRWA instead of its good work on behalf of Palestine refugees in such areas as education and health care. The international community greatly appreciated the efforts of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and his team, and understood the difficulties they faced on a daily basis. The horror faced by the people of the Syrian Arab Republic over the past five years was indescribable. The situation in Aleppo was a tragedy that must come to an end. The conflict in that country had brought bloodshed and destruction to Palestine refugees and other members of Syrian society, with the more than half a million Palestinians registered with UNRWA in that country among the worst affected. The Palestine refugees often had fewer coping mechanisms than their Syrian counterparts, as their options to travel legally outside the Syrian Arab Republic were severely restricted.

31. **Mr. Mounzer** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking on a point of order, said that the agenda item under discussion was UNRWA. The topic at hand was Palestine refugees, not Syria or Aleppo. He asked the speaker to restrict his remarks to the agenda item.

32. **The Chair** asked the representative of Iceland to restrict his statement to the topic under the agenda item.

33. **Mr. Gunnarsson** (Iceland) said that the Palestine refugees who had fled the Syrian conflict to Lebanon were particularly vulnerable, given border restrictions, their precarious legal status in that country and limited social protection services. About 93 per cent of those people were highly dependent on UNRWA for a broad range of regular and humanitarian assistance, which was unacceptable. On a positive note, when 6,000 Palestine refugee families had returned to their homes in

Husayniyah, UNRWA had been able to successfully resume services for them — reopening the health centre, the community centre and four schools serving more than 3,300 students, some of whom had missed more than two years of school. Although such cases were rare, they were indicative of the essential role played by UNRWA with regard to the Palestine refugee population.

34. The complex political context in Lebanon caused difficulty for Palestine refugees there. Reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared camp in northern Lebanon was slow; even nine years after its destruction, not all residents had been able to return to it.

35. In Gaza, due to the ongoing Israeli blockade, almost the entire Palestinian population was dependent on aid to meet basic needs. There was a limit to what UNRWA and other humanitarian actors could do. Iceland was proud to have been able to provide additional funding to UNRWA in the past year. While the financial situation of the Agency was not as dire as it had been in 2015, it remained precarious. It was therefore imperative to find a sustainable solution. Subsistence living only increased the sense of despair and insecurity suffered by the Palestinian people.

36. UNRWA was key to preventing conflict in the region, and without it, the situation could grow much worse. Until a just and lasting solution was found for the Palestine refugee population as a whole, UNRWA would continue to be needed. In that light, the international community should make every effort to honour its responsibilities towards the refugees. His Government had and would continue to support UNRWA and encouraged other Member States to do the same.

37. **Mr. Mounzer** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the situation of the Palestine refugees was not merely a humanitarian catastrophe, but also a political, legal and ethical issue. Since 1949, UNRWA had been an eyewitness to Palestinian suffering, as well as itself a target of the Israeli occupation forces. During the recent attack on Gaza, UNRWA personnel had been murdered and UNRWA schools had been destroyed even as refugees were sheltering inside them. Meanwhile, the international community appeared powerless to implement General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and other resolutions on the Israeli occupation, which merely emboldened Israel to continue to deny the right of Palestinians to return to their homes.

38. The host States that had welcomed Palestine refugees should also be regarded as donor States, given the enormous services and assistance that they were

called upon to provide. His country was treating the refugees living on its soil as Syrian citizens, without discrimination, until such time as they could exercise their right of return. During a recent visit to the Syrian Arab Republic, the Commissioner-General had expressed his appreciation for the facilities provided to UNRWA by the Syrian Government.

39. The Syrian Arab Republic spared no effort to protect Palestine refugees from attacks by armed terrorist groups. Palestinians in the Yarmouk camp were being besieged from within by the Nusrah Front and other terrorist groups known to have foreign ties. On several occasions, UNRWA had complained that it was unable to deliver assistance to that camp because Agency personnel had been barred entry by armed groups. What the terrorists were doing to Palestine refugees in Syria was part of a larger plot to disperse them still further afield in order to prevent them from ever returning to their homes in accordance with the relevant international resolutions.

40. All the delegations present must have found it odd to hear the representative of the Israeli occupation forces express "concern" for Palestine refugees and UNRWA personnel in Syria. As everyone was aware, the primary cause of Palestinian suffering was Israel, which, not content with having turned the Palestinians into refugees in the first place, was attacking them in the places to which they had fled, while at the same time criticizing UNRWA for providing humanitarian assistance. UNRWA should continue to provide that assistance in accordance with General Assembly resolution 302 (IV), which had established the Agency, and General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which guaranteed Palestine refugees compensation and the right of return.

41. **Ms. Krisnamurthi** (Indonesia) said that her Government was an ongoing supporter of the work of UNRWA, which had been invaluable to so many refugees since its establishment in 1949. In that connection the financial crisis plaguing the Agency was deeply worrying. While the number of registered refugees continued to grow, the resources available to the Agency had dwindled alarmingly. The current funding gap of \$74 million placed at risk the ability of UNRWA to maintain its operations through the end of that year. Consistent with the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, Indonesia encouraged support from a broader range of donors, with diminished earmarking and increased multi-year funding, in order to close the existing gap. In that vein, her delegation welcomed the increasing engagement of the World Bank and multilateral development banks, improvements in access to concessional development

financing for affected communities, and the support of the private sector, host countries and civil society to refugee communities.

42. Addressing the root cause of displacement — namely, Israel's continued occupation of Palestine — was essential to addressing the refugee problem itself. It was unrealistic to discuss the refugee issue separately from the right to return when the conflict was over. With increasingly aggressive and intensive settlement in Occupied Territory, the question of Palestine threatened to become a permanent problem. In their reports to the Security Council, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator had stressed that the establishment of a Palestinian State would help to address Israeli security concerns and yield major dividends for both parties to the conflict as well as the entire region. Member States should not lose sight of the issue of Palestine refugees among other existing conflicts. Instead, they should address the causes of the issue so as not to have to labour over the consequences.

43. **Mr. Sobral Duarte** (Brazil) said that his delegation continued to recognize the vital role played by UNRWA in providing humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees across the Middle East. Regrettably, however, the Agency remained under pressure and no visible progress had been achieved towards the two-State solution.

44. The recent wave of tensions and violence between Israelis and Palestinians, the expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, and the persistent restrictions on economic and humanitarian activities in Gaza exacerbated the challenges faced by the Agency. Meanwhile, the worsening conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic had forced thousands of Palestine refugees enjoying safety there to seek shelter elsewhere in the region and beyond, including in Brazil. Given that dire scenario, the endeavours of UNRWA deserved the unmitigated support of the United Nations and its Member States.

45. The unprecedented financial crisis impacting UNRWA was a cause for deep concern. The Agency needed sufficient funding to carry out its activities effectively and in a predictable manner. To that end, a greater share of UNRWA funding, including for substantive projects, should be derived from the regular budget of the United Nations. The Secretariat of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA should strive for greater efficiency in preparing regular reports and

circulating draft decisions, thus enabling the Agency to be even more effective in its everyday activities. In recent years, his Government had increased its cooperation with UNRWA through voluntary financial contributions and food assistance, as well as bilateral and multilateral initiatives, including medical projects implemented by the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility Fund for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation in Gaza.

46. The draft resolutions to be adopted by the General Assembly would extend the mandate of UNRWA until June 2020. His delegation hoped that such renewals for the Agency, which was never intended to be a permanent fixture of the Organization, would not be necessary in future. The international community should ensure that Palestinians had an independent, free and viable State to live in, and that they no longer had to rely on international assistance for their fundamental needs. It should work towards a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and turn the two-State solution into a reality.

47. **Ms. Özgür** (Turkey) said that UNRWA, was subject to an ever greater degree of pressure due to the expanding refugee population and their worsening living conditions, aggravated by complex regional developments. UNRWA continued to be threatened by insufficient resources. Despite the measures taken in recent years to secure sustained and predictable financing for the essential services it provided, much remained to be done to bolster its financial stability. As Chair of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, Turkey wished to propose a change of approach to UNRWA finances, including long-term financial commitment by Member States, the implementation of innovative funding, and the widening of the donor base. The international community was strongly encouraged to fulfil its pledges and to redouble its efforts to enable UNRWA to effectively respond to the needs of the Palestine refugees.

48. Turkey had contributed \$1.5 million in cash to UNRWA in 2016, and 59,000 tons of flour — amounting to another \$27.4 million — since 2011. Her country would continue to make such contributions.

49. Turkey would serve as Vice-Chair of the Advisory Commission in July 2017 and as Chair in 2018. In those capacities, it would continue to emphasize the need to provide sufficient, sustainable and predictable funding to UNRWA. Turkey looked forward to the upcoming visit of the Commissioner-General. The solidarity it felt with Palestine refugees, as well as its support for the work of UNRWA in the region, would be ongoing.

50. **Mr. Al Neama** (Qatar) said that until the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict reached a final settlement that included the right of return in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III), the international community would continue to have a humanitarian and legal obligation to provide Palestine refugees with assistance. The services provided by UNRWA at least provided a bare minimum of health care, education, food, shelter, social services, and protection in the face of escalating violence in the West Bank and the siege imposed on Gaza. The burdens created by recent regional instability only added to the chronic funding gaps in the UNRWA programme budget, and put an even greater premium on efficient use of resources. He commended UNRWA for following the framework set out in its medium-term strategy for 2010-2015 while maintaining a high quality of services.

51. His country had paid the first three instalments of its pledge of \$5 million over a five-year period made at the 2013 High-level Ministerial Meeting on the Financial Sustainability of UNRWA. It would also fulfil its pledges made at the 2014 Cairo International Conference on Palestine: Reconstructing Gaza. He commended the Governments and donor institutions that had raised their levels of support, and expressed his delegation's appreciation for UNRWA personnel, who carried out their duties under extremely difficult circumstances.

52. **Mr. Salih** (Sudan) said that the Commissioner-General's report had shown how the occupation affected virtually every aspect of daily life for the inhabitants of camps in Occupied Palestinian Territory. The poverty and despair had been heightened by the deteriorating situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. The most effective way to reduce dependence on UNRWA would be to lift the siege immediately and allow the movement of persons and goods necessary for reconstruction. Unfortunately, the occupying Power continued not only to besiege Gazans, but also to restrict the movement of UNRWA personnel, in violation of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies.

53. UNRWA would continue to play an essential role until such time as the parties to the conflict reached a permanent solution that included the right of return and fair compensation in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Meanwhile, the Agency was operating in difficult circumstances and under severe financial constraints. The funding shortfall threatened to undermine fulfilment by the Agency's 30,000 personnel of their responsibilities towards some

5 million refugees. He reminded delegations of paragraph 86 of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants contained in the very first resolution adopted by the current General Assembly session, which stated that United Nations entities such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNRWA and other relevant organizations required sufficient funding to be able to carry out their activities effectively and in a predictable manner.

54. **Mr. Aoki** (Japan) said that the role of UNRWA was more crucial than ever given the increasingly severe conditions faced by Palestine refugees due to conflicts in Gaza and Syria. His Government had announced two multi-year assistance packages that year; one for \$6 billion, which would include capacity-building for 20,000 people in the Middle East and North Africa; and a \$2.8 billion dollar package to support humanitarian needs and self-reliance for refugees and migrants, as well as host countries and communities. In addition, the importance of addressing immediate and long-term needs of refugees and displaced persons was highlighted in the Leaders' Declaration of the Ise-Shima Summit of the Group of Seven hosted by Japan in May

55. A long-time contributor to UNRWA, Japan had made its largest contributions to the Agency over the past two years. It had been pleased to welcome the Commissioner-General on a visit to exchange views with senior officials, the private sector, the media and Japanese non-governmental organizations working in Palestine. The international community must not forget the plight of Palestine refugees. His Government looked forward to continued work with UNRWA as the international community pursued a lasting solution to the issue.

56. **Ms. Abdullah** (Malaysia) said that the Agency's continued provision of critical services to Palestine refugees, despite difficult circumstances, was praiseworthy. Ironically, however, while the international community and agencies consistently sought to do more, or made endless suggestions for areas of priority, the root cause of the conflict — the prolonged and repressive military occupation — remained unresolved.

57. UNRWA was more necessary than ever, given the increasing volatility in the region and the growing violence, marginalization and poverty that continued to affect Palestine refugees. The Agency had shown great creativity in its programmes to ensure opportunities for Palestine refugees to rebuild their lives. Those programmes included Communications with

Communities, which, through an advocacy campaign and extensive refugee community outreach, demonstrated how greater access to information by Palestine refugees could ensure their voices were heard.

58. The issue of the legal status of Palestine refugees in Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which had not been addressed since it was first raised by the Commissioner-General in 2008, deserved the attention of the international community. Though that remained an issue of concern for her delegation, it was nevertheless encouraged by successful UNRWA endeavours, such as the education of over 500,000 children, the conduct of 9.1 million primary health care consultations, social safety net assistance, and the provision of microfinance loans to more than 38,000 people. The Agency had also made commendable reforms to its core programming in the areas of education, health management and gender-equality focus.

59. Malaysia firmly believed in the sanctity of a school environment, in particular for displaced children who had experienced psychological trauma. Schools should provide a safe haven for Palestinian refugee children, and not compromise their ability to fully realize the benefits of education. She therefore welcomed the Agency's implementation of the recommendations made by the United Nations Board of Inquiry in 2015 in order to hold to account the parties responsible for the seven incidents in which UNRWA schools in Gaza were struck by projectiles or other munitions between 8 July and 26 August 2014. Her delegation also welcomed the commitment made by Jordan, Lebanon and the State of Palestine to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. The Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict could be synergized with already existing additional protection under a separate legal framework to guarantee the inviolability of UNRWA school premises at all times. Continued cooperation between Member States and UNRWA in that area should be encouraged.

60. In conclusion, her delegation commended UNRWA for its efforts to broaden its donor base by, inter alia, strengthening relations with bilateral donor States, engaging with private partners, and nurturing ties with emerging markets.

61. **Mr. Yardley** (Australia) said that the deterioration of conditions in the region had made refugees increasingly reliant on UNRWA. He commended the Agency for continuing to operate in a difficult environment and maintaining its commitment to reconstruction in Gaza. He also acknowledged the

new Commissioner-General's commitment to reducing operating deficits. However, the projected \$74 million budget shortfall for 2016 threatened the Agency's viability. He urged UNRWA to broaden its donor base so that it could be less dependent on the core group of traditional donors. As neutrality was one of the Agency's most important assets, its recently developed Neutrality Framework, its standard operating procedures, and its establishment of operational support officer positions were crucial for strengthening accountability.

62. His country had contributed to UNRWA every year since 1951, and had provided \$106 million in core contributions and emergency funding since 2011. In an assessment of the Agency's performance conducted early in 2016, his Government had concluded that UNRWA was an effective partner for delivering key services and was committed to necessary reforms. In September, Australia had provided the first instalment of an additional \$80 million in funding for the period 2016-2020. He expressed the hope that the Agency would continue to have a positive effect on the lives of Palestinians and a stabilizing impact on the entire region. However, a better future for Palestine refugees must ultimately rest on a political solution that resulted in Israel and a Palestinian State living side-by-side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.

63. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) said that in their respective letters of transmittal attached to the Commissioner-General's report, the Commissioner-General had noted a general deep sense of despair and insecurity that ran through the Palestine refugee community, and the Chair of the UNRWA Advisory Commission had expressed his concern about the increasing volatility in the region, the considerable increase in violence in the West Bank and the number of sustained injuries and deaths mentioned in the report. Forced displacement, home demolition, construction of the separation wall and the closure of Gaza were continuing with impunity, in violation of the prohibition against collective penalties in article 33 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Settlement activity was also going forward, in violation of the prohibition in article 49 of that Convention against the deportation or transfer by an occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupied. Israel was also continuing to destroy homes and displace their owners in Jerusalem, in violation of Security Council resolution 478 (1980).

64. That UNRWA was managing to operate under difficult circumstances was a testament to the success

of the Agency's administrative reforms. He commended the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA for its second resource mobilization strategy for the period 2016-2018 and its medium-term strategy for the period 2016-2021. Nevertheless, overcoming the budget shortfall without a reduction in services would require continued financial as well as moral support. UNRWA would remain a permanent fixture until the political roots of the Palestinian problem were addressed and Palestinians were able to exercise their right of return as provided for in paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

65. **Mr. Bouassila** (Algeria) said that his delegation appreciated the efforts of UNRWA to provide at least minimal levels of education, health care and housing to millions of refugees. The siege of Gaza, violent repression in the West Bank, restrictions on movement, forced displacement, home demolition, and other flagrant violations being committed by the occupation authorities not only increased the despair and frustration of Palestine refugees, but also increased the burdens placed on UNRWA.

66. His delegation called on the international community to do what was necessary to cover the Agency's budget shortfall and find new approaches to securing its financial future. He commended the Agency's second resource mobilization strategy for the period 2016-2018 and its medium-term strategy for the period 2016-2021. However, in the long term, the problem of the refugees could only be solved by a just resolution of the conflict that included the right of return. He condemned Israel's settlement policy, which was deliberately creating facts on the ground in order to undermine the two-State solution envisioned by the Arab Peace Initiative, and urged the international community to redouble its efforts towards establishing an independent Palestinian State that exercised full control over its natural resources, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

67. *Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia) resumed the Chair.*

68. **Mr. Agasandyan** (Russian Federation) said that recent events in the Middle East had turned many Palestinians into refugees for the second or even third time. Noting that the burden of caring for those refugees fell largely on UNRWA, he expressed appreciation for the efforts of that Agency's personnel to provide education, health care and social services for the millions of people held hostage to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and other regional upheavals. His country had made contributions to the Agency's budget in 2013 in 2015, and had repeatedly called for adequate funding for UNRWA within the

administrative and budgetary bodies of the General Assembly. The Russian Federation also provided direct assistance to the State of Palestine and to Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic, and had awarded several hundred scholarships for Palestinians to study in the Russian Federation.

69. UNRWA personnel in Occupied Palestinian Territory operated in a dangerous environment where conflict might flare up at any moment. Recently, they had also provided indispensable services to Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic, particularly in the Yarmouk camp, which had been occupied by terrorists. Unlike certain other international agencies and despite external pressures, UNRWA had maintained its neutrality over the years. It was imperative for the Agency to continue its work until a just resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was reached. As a permanent member of the Security Council and a member of the Middle East Quartet, the Russian Federation would continue to work for a two-State solution. He called for greater use of the mediation potential of the Quartet, which had issued a report in July containing recommendations for overcoming the impasse in the peace process.

70. **Mr. Al-Mouallimi** (Saudi Arabia) said that his country was proud to be at the top of the list of donors to UNRWA, alongside the United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom. In 2016 alone, the Saudi Fund for Economic Development had donated close to \$100 million, including \$59 million for housing, education and health projects in Gaza, the West Bank and Jordan. That Fund had also signed a memorandum of understanding that would provide \$32 million for the reconstruction of more than 5,000 houses destroyed in the 2014 Israeli attack against Gaza, with priority given to households headed by women. It had also provided \$10 million for the construction of a facility in Rafah in the South of the Gaza Strip that would serve as the main supply base and storage facility for UNRWA. That last project was part of a \$62 million package that had been signed with UNRWA in May 2015. Saudi Arabia had also provided close to \$2 million for the construction of a health centre in the Aqabat Jabr camp in the Jordan Valley, which had opened in October.

71. The Kingdom was also a leader in supporting UNRWA efforts on behalf of Palestine refugees in other parts of the Middle East. The education and employment opportunities provided by the Agency were the first line of defence against extremist ideologies. UNRWA had been an eyewitness to 70 years of catastrophe, 50 years of occupation and 10 years of the Gaza siege. In the light of the ongoing suffering, it was

distressing to hear from the Commissioner-General that chronic budget shortfalls were threatening the Agency's capacities to respond to humanitarian needs. He commended measures taken to reduce administrative costs while maintaining the quality of services, and welcomed the recommendations contained in the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA. His delegation reiterated its call on donor States and institutions to step up their contributions and urged the United Nations to facilitate access for UNRWA to additional funding streams.

72. His country would continue to support UNRWA in its efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people until such time as the refugees could return to their homes and receive compensation in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The tragedy of the Palestinian people would not end as long as Israel continued to occupy Arab territory, violate international law and persist in its illegal settlement policies. Contrary to what the representative of Israel had said, the right of return was no idle dream, but an inalienable right. He called for the roots of the problem to be addressed by an Israeli withdrawal to the lines of 4 June 1967 and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital.

73. **Mr. Carroll** (Observer for the Holy See) said that UNRWA was active in territories that were historically part of the ancient Christian heartland. Greatly reduced in number, Christians of the region were among the refugees and internally displaced searching for peace and security abroad.

74. Like UNRWA, various entities and organizations of the Catholic Church provided education, health care and social services to refugees and the internally displaced. Those services, which included educational programmes for children and adults, and rehabilitation for those physically and mentally traumatized by incessant conflict, were provided to all in need regardless of creed. Generous donors associated with the Catholic Church around the globe made such activities possible. The work of the Holy See in the region, like that of UNRWA, was donor driven.

75. Jerusalem was the spiritual patrimony of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In that context, the Holy See renewed its support for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question surrounding that city. Such a solution should, *inter alia*, ensure the freedom of religion and conscience of all its inhabitants, as well as secure, free and unhindered access to holy places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities.

76. Heinous crimes were being committed daily against refugee populations, affecting their education and health-care facilities and essential civilian infrastructure. Siege and bombardment were forcing Palestine refugees in Syria to once again flee as their camps became targets of military action.

77. Lebanon and Jordan had an enduring collaboration with UNRWA; along with some other countries in the region, they were contending heroically with the influx of refugees from Iraq and Syria. Lebanon desperately needed the attention and support of the international community to stabilize its institutions, to protect its citizens, and to deal with millions of refugees. Jordan, likewise, required international assistance to care for the millions of refugees in its territory, to guarantee security and social cohesion to its own people, and to fend off attempts by terrorist and extremist groups seeking to push Jordan into the violence plaguing the region.

78. Peacemaking and substantive dialogue, including bilateral negotiations, should replace the counterproductive illogic of violence and war in the Middle East. Military solutions and the support of client States or non-State actors by the industrialized nations of the world had only served to increase the number of civilian casualties. Accessible humanitarian assistance for the refugees and the internally displaced should replace the flood of weapons inundating the region from all over the globe. The international community should never give up hope that peace would eventually come to that significant and sacred land.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

79. **Ms. Radwan** (Saudi Arabia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that she was sorry to have to take the floor again, but felt compelled to express her delegation's shock and surprise at the reference made to her country by the representative of Ecuador at the Committee's 21st meeting. Numerous UNRWA officials had praised the generous contributions made by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Agency and to a host of Agency projects in areas ranging from infrastructure to housing to education. Her country had a long history of fruitful cooperation with UNRWA. She urged the representative of Ecuador to review the facts, and could only assume that the statement about Saudi Arabia had been made in error.

80. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that her delegation deplored the continued denial by Israel of the rights of Palestine refugees, including the right of return, which applied to

all refugees under international law and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants recently adopted by world leaders. That right was neither an anachronism nor an entitlement to be enjoyed by some groups but not others on the basis of policies that ranged from distorted and irrational to blatantly discriminatory and illegal. She wondered how a State that clung to a past going back over 3,000 years to justify any and all actions, however illegal or cruel, could deny the Palestinian people's past of fewer than 70 years and justify severing the Palestinian connection to its ancestral homeland and negating their right to return to live at peace with their neighbours, as called for in General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and reaffirmed by overwhelming consensus and international law.

81. Decisions, policies and practices aimed at demographic purity had no basis in international law and no place in a civilized world; such legally, morally and ethically bankrupt policies would never bring peace or coexistence. No amount of clever public relations could repackage an injustice as something other than an injustice, and only justice could remedy it — not empty words and certainly not more violations. Israel must face the fact that the expulsion, uprooting and massacre of Palestinian civilians in 1948 — recognized by Israeli and other historians as a deliberate act of ethnic cleansing — had been a grave injustice.

82. Dismissing and belittling symbols such as the key to a home, held dear by Palestine refugees; equating Palestine refugees with teaching intolerance and hatred; and accusing UNRWA of bias in that regard were indicative of the illogical and rejectionist narrative that Israel continued to promote on the issue. Moreover, the claim that the Palestinian people and leadership did not want peace was completely disingenuous. She wondered how much more they must compromise and how much more suffering they must patiently and quietly endure until the Israeli Government acknowledged the Palestinian commitment to a just and peaceful solution and, in particular, the Palestinian recognition, exist over two decades ago, of the State of Israel and its right to exist, for which Israel had never reciprocated. Israel's continued propagation of such false claims exposed ill intent and an evasion of facts, as well as that Government's unwillingness to make the rights-based, justice-based peace that the State of Palestine had openly committed to in accordance with international law and the Arab Peace Initiative, which called for a just and agreed solution to the Palestine refugee question on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). It was high time for Israel to reciprocate and open the doors to a just, lasting peace and a better future

for Palestinian and Israeli children, which UNRWA and the international community were collectively striving to achieve. In conclusion, she said that the State of Palestine wished to express its deepest gratitude for every contribution, large and small, and for every expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

83. **Ms. Horsandi** (Israel) said that she was incredulous that the Syrian representative had had the audacity to blame Israel for the situation of Palestine refugees in Syria. According to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA himself, Agency staff members had been missing, detained, kidnapped or presumed to be detained in Syria, with the Syrian authorities refusing to allow UNRWA access to those staff members it had detained. She recalled that the Syrian Government had participated in the systematic killing of its own people and was starving the Palestinian community in the Yarmouk refugee camp to death.

84. Turning to the Board of Inquiry, which several representatives had mentioned, she pointed out that the Secretary-General had expressed dismay at the use by Hamas of United Nations schools to hide their weapons, as well as at that group's conduct of hostile activities against Israeli civilians from within United Nations premises or in their immediate vicinity, thereby endangering civilian lives by using them as human shields. She reiterated her Government's call for the resumption of negotiations, which the Palestinian leadership had regrettably refused on various occasions. Direct negotiations were the only way to achieve a two-State solution for two peoples living side by side in peace and security.

85. **Ms. Pereira** (Ecuador), responding to the remarks made by the representative of Saudi Arabia, said that she wished to apologize for the error and provide clarification regarding the misunderstanding that had arisen. Her delegation should have referred to paragraph 47 of the Commissioner-General's report about the Agency's continued payment of airport taxes and other fees, contrary to the agreement concluded between the United Nations and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in 1948. Instead, Ecuador had made its remarks in the context of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and other agreements that granted United Nations agencies protection and immunities for conducting their work. Ecuador endorsed the support provided to UNRWA by Saudi Arabia.

86. **Mr. Mounzer** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the hypocrisy of the statements made by the representative of Israel came as no surprise. He wished to remind that representative,

as she wept for the poor Palestinians and UNRWA personnel, that the party responsible for their suffering and bloodshed was the occupying Power. During its 2014 attack on Gaza, Israel had killed 11 UNRWA personnel, 530 Palestinian children, 302 women, 23 medical staff and 15 journalists. Some 10,870 people had been injured, including 2,100 women and 3,300 children, 1,000 of whom would be disabled for life. Israel's "reconstruction" efforts in Gaza had consisted of 8,210 rocket attacks, 15,736 naval shelling attacks and 36,718 artillery attacks. Those were the gifts from Israel to the children of Gaza.

87. **Ms. Radwan** (Saudi Arabia) said that her delegation appreciated the clarification provided by the representative of Ecuador as well as that delegation's patience and due diligence.

88. **Mr. Krähenbühl** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)) said that although he appreciated the expressions of condolences, it would be preferable not to make them within the context of polarized statements. Follow-up with regard to the loss of staff members had been undertaken with the Governments of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and were a matter of public record.

89. He expressed his appreciation to the host and donor Governments that had supported the Agency over decades. Their support and contributions had made the formidable human development work possible. The commitments and pledges of support made during the current meeting were also very encouraging. It was his wish, however, that Palestinians would be recognized in collective efforts not only for their immense suffering but also for their skills, their abilities and their motivation.

90. He called for international action in response to the damage or destruction of 44 per cent of UNRWA schools during military incursions over the past five years alone. While great attention was paid to the need to protect medical missions, ambulances and medical personnel and installations, schools required equal and urgent attention.

91. Issues of access persisted, in particular with respect to the work of the Agency in the Syrian Arab Republic. That, however, was a matter to be discussed directly with the Syrian Government. The Agency would also engage in dialogue with the Israeli Government on the same topic.

92. The recognition of Member States was particularly heartening, given that when he had presented his first report to the Fourth Committee two

years ago, they had emphasized the need for Agency reform to promote efficiency and curtail expenditures. Member States now seemed to realize that UNRWA had taken serious action to address those concerns. And yet it now faced a paradox, highlighted by many, characterized by recurring financial issues. He wished to thank the United Arab Emirates for their additional financial contribution and looked forward to other such support to be able to close the year. He also looked forward to efforts to ensure greater financial stability, including through voluntary and assessed contributions.

93. UNRWA took the issue of efficiency very seriously. However, it should be recalled that it was the only agency within the United Nations system in which national staff were not paid against an international comparator. That raised issues of fairness that were of deep concern to UNRWA staff. Although there were a number of issues to be discussed in terms of how the Agency managed its financial situation, he understood the challenge that the situation presented to his Palestinian colleagues, who were asked to undertake greater efforts in terms of financial management.

94. He wished to reply to a number of the comments made the previous day by the representative of Israel. First, it should be emphasized that the term "refugees" was anchored in international law and could not be referred to with inverted commas. There was no claim of return mentioned in General Assembly resolution 194 (III); there was a right of return. However, the Agency was not mandated to advocate for that right.

95. Passing along the issue of the Palestine refugees to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees would require fundamental changes within the Fourth Committee as well as a review of the UNRWA mandate. More importantly, unlike the Agency, UNHCR had a resettlement mandate, an issue which, within the context of Palestine refugees, was sensitive.

96. He also wished to note that the spokesperson of the Commissioner-General should not be reviewed as such. He himself took full responsibility for all statements made by his spokesperson, as he would with respect to the conduct of any other staff member.

97. The representative of Israel had also commented on the failure of Agency school curricula to take the other into consideration. Objectively, that was a challenge in most conflict zones. In the publication, "Victims of Our Own Narratives? Portrayal of the 'Other' in Israeli and Palestinian Schoolbooks", it was pointed out that on both sides of the conflict, there was difficulty portraying or recognizing the rights of the "other". Approximately 90 per cent of Palestinian students growing up in the Gaza Strip had never left.

Contrary to their parents and grandparents, they had never seen an Israeli. For that reason, their only notion of the latter was derived from military interventions or the results of the blockade. And, based on discussions with Israeli officials, there seemed to be a similar trend among Israeli youth. Very few had direct connections with or had ever met a Palestinian young person. How could such a situation be expected to serve as a basis for better future interaction or to build tolerance? The international community was collectively responsible for addressing that state of affairs. UNRWA, taking the matter very seriously, included human rights education in the curricula of its schools. However, it should be noted that the environment of the Gaza Strip was hardly conducive to increased tolerance. He was prepared to engage in dialogue with Israel on the issue.

98. On several occasions, he had asked senior Israeli military officials whether there was any proof that Hamas or any other Palestinian faction had fired rockets in the direction of Israel during the 2014 conflict, to which the answer had always been negative. In some instances, rockets had been fired from within the immediate vicinity of UNRWA installations. However, that was hardly surprising given the densely populated and urbanized landscape of Gaza. It should be noted that when Israeli security forces deployed into the Gaza Strip, some of their military units had also fired from within the vicinity of UNRWA and civilian installations. That was a matter of public record.

99. With regard to advocacy, the representative of Israel had implied that UNRWA devoted a significant portion of its resources to advocacy. That matter, which had not been documented, should be discussed bilaterally.

100. In conclusion, a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees must be found. No amount of humanitarian aid or development efforts would ever make up for the denial of the dignity or the rights of any community in the world. It was very important to go beyond simple pledges of renewed allegiance to the two-State solution; international action was necessary to bring about a political solution. Palestine refugees should not have to rely on UNRWA for another 66 years for their immediate needs. UNRWA did not have a political mandate, and yet it was faced daily with the human costs of the unresolved political issue at the heart of the Middle East. In the meantime, the Agency would continue to fulfil its mandate with the support and encouragement of Member States.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.